

# Big Lake

When mid-summer fishing doldrums set in at White Mountain lakes and streams because of water quality, Big Lake typically continues to produce decent fishing action. Because of its size, productivity and visitor amenities, Big Lake is considered one of the White Mountain's best fishing lakes. As with most trout waters in Arizona, catch rates are best in spring, during late April and May after the winter ice thaws, and gets better later in the summer and into fall until freezing over again in late November.

**Location** - Situated at 9,000 feet in the Apache-Sitgreaves National Forests, Big Lake is located about 30 miles south of Springerville and Eagar, accessed by paved road via Highways 260 and 261, and is approximately one hour's drive from Pinetop using Highways 260 and 273 and Forest Road 113. Access is restricted in the winter when roads are closed due to snow, generally December to early April.



**Description** - Big Lake has 532 surface acres, with an average depth of 16 feet. Primary fish species here include rainbow, brook and cutthroat trout, with an occasional Apache trout, Arizona's official state fish. Each year, the Department stocks an average of 400,000 fingerling trout, which are two- to three-inch fish. Most of these are rainbows. Catchable-sized Apache trout are sometimes stocked during hot summer months as water conditions deteriorate at other lakes.

**Amenities** - There are several visitor amenities here that the Forest Service maintains, including over 200 fee-camping sites, two boat ramps, fish cleaning stations, picnic tables, restrooms with flush toilets, showers, drinking water, a dump station and a visitor center open during the summer. A concessionaire operates a small convenience store where you can purchase fishing licenses, food, gas and fishing supplies, or rent a boat.

**Fishing Techniques** - Bait and shore fishermen can try anything from worms to Power Bait. Fishing from a boat is generally more successful in the summer and fall than fishing from the shoreline. Boaters should try trolling spinners and flies. To attract cutthroats, use lures that resemble crayfish or their movement. Brook trout will hit flies, but also try nightcrawlers on the bottom. When brook trout spawn during the fall, catch them with roe or salmon eggs. Big Lake is well known for producing large brookies in October and November.

**Special Notes** – Statewide fishing regulations apply, and a trout stamp is required. The daily bag limit is six trout for adults or three for unlicensed youth under the age of 14, and may include an combination of species. Boat motors are restricted to electric or 10 hp or less gas motors.